

# **Constraints and Subsequent Limitations to Parental Involvement in Primary Schools in Abu Dhabi: Stakeholders' Perspectives**

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## **Abstract**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is developing its public schools by initiating reform agendas for school improvement. High on the list of reforms is the call to increase parental involvement in schools. For this reform to work successfully, it is important to identify and examine the constraints and subsequent limitations that exist. Seven primary Public Private Partnership schools (PPP) in Abu Dhabi were the focus of this qualitative case study. Participants were school stakeholders: school administrators, social workers, teachers, and parents. The findings will assist in developing continuing policies and practices which take these limitations into account and work to mitigate them. Recommendations are made based within the context of the findings.

Keywords: parental involvement, support structures, communication, social context, school reforms, parents, teachers, administrators, social workers, roles, education, stakeholders, gender, United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi

## **Introduction**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven emirates situated in the southeast of the Arabian Peninsula. Islam is the official religion, and Arabic is the official language. It has an infrastructure that is moderating its dependence on oil, so education reforms and systemic reorganization have

become a priority for desirable, sustainable development. According to His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and the Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Educational Council, “the UAE has begun a journey of growth and modernization, as far as reforming the educational system” (ADEC, 2008, p. 1). This is recorded in law, for example, “Law No 8 (2008) reorganized the Abu Dhabi Education Council, so that it incorporates the three education zones including the city of Abu Dhabi, Al-Ain and the Western Region, and thus expanding the autonomy of the education system in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi” (ADEC, 2008, p. 1).

The Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) is a nonfederal government authority charged with the task of developing education through curricular, pedagogical, and school leadership reforms (Kannan, 2008). As part of the reforms, the Public Private Partnership (PPP) initiative was piloted in 2006. The PPP program was launched by ADEC to improve standards in public (government) schools with the aid of private education providers.

According to ADEC statistics for the academic year 2009–2010, there are 116 PPP schools in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi; this includes the city of Abu Dhabi, the Western region, and Al-Ain. Among these 116 schools, 48 are in the city of Abu Dhabi. These 48 schools include 10 secondary schools (3 common schools, i.e., schools that are both primary and secondary existing as one school, see <http://www.dubaifaqs.com/schools-ppp-abu-dhabi.php>), 30 primary schools (3 common schools), and the remainder are kindergartens. The PPP schools in the UAE are segregated by gender. PPP primary schools for girls are managed by females; the majority of PPP male primary schools are managed by males, with some exceptions. Mixed male–female staffing and administration only occurs in a few male primary schools which have western females as PPP managers.

This study explores the constraints and subsequent limitations to parental involvement within primary PPP schools in Abu Dhabi during the early phase of implementation of the New School Model (NSM) in accordance with ADEC’s Ten-Year Strategic Plan (ADEC, 2010). It is carried out by three expatriate education studies faculty members at an educational institution in Abu Dhabi. The researchers are from Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, respectively. One member is bilingual and speaks fluent Arabic. All have worked in the field of education in Abu Dhabi for more than three years.

## Literature Review

To meet the demands of government authorities, educators, parents, community groups, and students to improve schools, change is sought. In the UAE,

the reform agenda for improving schools is strongly voiced by researchers (Davies, 1999; Riel, 1999; Safran, 1997) and government officials alike. Dr. Al Khaili, the Director General of ADEC, notes, “we don’t just want to improve our education system, our schools, and the performance of our students...we want to be ranked as one of the best education systems in the world” (ADEC, 2008, p. 1). In Abu Dhabi, this drive for school improvement resulted in the initiation of the “New School Model” by ADEC in 2010. This new model is proclaimed as “a new approach to teaching and learning...to improve student learning experiences and to raise academic outcomes of Abu Dhabi students to the internationally competitive level necessary to achieve the Abu Dhabi economic vision 2030” (ADEC, 2010). Among the many accompanying policies in support of the model, parent involvement in children’s education is high on the agenda. Specific guidelines for building productive home–school relationships claim: “Parents play an essential role in their children’s education. School staff and parents share responsibility for ensuring that parents are actively involved in their children’s education” (ADEC, 2010, p. 35).

The literature review that follows draws from both western and nonwestern sources. It discusses the nature of parental involvement and identifies inherent constraints and subsequent limitations facing parental involvement in schools in a balance of both western and nonwestern studies. There is notably a paucity of literature which examines this notion of parental involvement in Abu Dhabi within this period of reform.

### Overview

A study conducted by Obeidat and Al-Hassan (2009) in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan explored how 28 teachers who received the Queen Rania Award for Excellence in Education created school–parent–community partnerships. Five categories emerged from the data: (1) communicating with parents, (2) involving parents in the learning process, (3) involving the community in the school, (4) pursuing volunteer projects, and (5) involving students in the community.

Khasawneh and Alsagheer (2007) conducted a survey on family involvement in Al-Ain, United Arab Emirates. The findings showed that there is a need for increased parent involvement among parents in Al-Ain schools to improve academic achievement and enhance student learning. Where this already was happening, positive effects were found on learning. As an outcome of the study, the researchers proposed a model of school- and home-based involvement to introduce the following units: organizational structure, communication, programs and planning, family–school forum, and continuous assessment and monitoring.

Epstein's model (2001) of family involvement identifies six types: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) present a three-level involvement tier. At the behavioral tier, communication between home and school equates to volunteering and assisting with homework. At the cognitive collaboration level, parents adopt an educational role, exposing their children to educationally stimulating activities and experiences. At the personal level, attitudes and expectations about school and education combine to convey an enjoyment of learning.

Although both western and nonwestern models and studies coincide in identifying the nature and type of home and school links, there are sociocultural contexts that differ and alter subsequent features in the enactment of parental involvement. These contexts may produce perceived constraints and limitations to the process.

### **Constraints and Limitations**

A number of studies suggest that a lack of mutual understanding of what parental involvement means is the greatest limitation to effective parent involvement. As Scribner, Young, and Pedroza (1999) state, people from different sociocultural contexts have different views of what parent involvement is, and these views are culturally variable (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). Further, administrators, teachers, and parents may have different goals for parent involvement, and for this reason, a shared definition may not exist (Harris & Goodall, 2008). This may, in itself, create a perceived barrier to parental involvement. For example, research conducted in Latino cultures sees the parents' role as providing nurturance, instilling morals, and promoting good behavior. This does not concur fully with a western model which views parents as having a hand-in-hand relationship with the school to promote academic achievement (Carger, 1997; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Espinosa, 1995; Trumbull et al., 2001).

According to Moosa, Karabenick, and Adams (2001), who examined Arab parent involvement in elementary schools in an urban Midwestern district in the U.S., sociocultural contexts are important determinants of Arab parental involvement. Though the context of their study is not that of Abu Dhabi, the findings shed light on constraints that limit parental involvement in Abu Dhabi schools. These constraints revolve around cross-cultural communication barriers (inclusive of language, body language, etc.) between the teachers and parents, gender segregation, and sociocultural contexts of behavior.

It has been suggested by Van Der Linde (1997) that in Canada, the U.S., Malaysia, and South Africa, where multiethnic and pluralistic communities

exist, cross-cultural communication between teachers and parents is significant in determining parental involvement. Though the local Emirati population in Abu Dhabi is monoethnic, the new school reforms have enlisted the presence of licensed teachers from Canada, the U.S., South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. The situation has created tensions in the area of language and communication across cultures. It can be argued that such factors impact the process of learning because, as Vygotsky (1986) notes, language is essential for knowledge construction and cognitive development. The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute (2007) found that a mismatch between language in the home and at school is an insurmountable barrier facing parents when helping their children with homework at home.

An area of much concern is that English, as a global language, has become part of educational reform resulting in the import of native English speakers into classrooms in various parts of the world, including Abu Dhabi. For example, in 1985, the Japanese government introduced the Japan Exchange and Teaching program which employs native English teachers to introduce a communication-focused approach to English learning (Littlewood, 1981; Nunan, 1988). This has not been without its challenges, as teachers do not share the Japanese language with their counterparts. In addition, as Guest (2002) and Littlewood (2000) state, sociocultural contexts such as membership and identity should be considered during the reform process. It is argued that as methodologies are exported across contexts, careful monitoring is needed to prevent failure due to the mismatch between teachers' methodology and expectations and those of parents (Hu, 2002; Nunan, 2003). This is because these reforms do not conform to the culture and social environment; such conforming is critical to the process of learning when knowledge is co-constructed between two or more people, with language as the most critical tool for cultural transmission (Vygotsky, 1986).

Further, for cognitive change to occur, Vygotsky (1986) theorized the need for dialectical (cognitive) constructivism, which emphasizes interaction between persons and their environment. In instances where English is the predominant medium of instruction and communication for curricular and pedagogical change, social interactions and cognitive change processes create tensions in home-school communications as cultural and language tools are compromised or even abstracted from interactions. Wertsch's (1991) approach to mediated interaction stresses the importance inherent in the cultural, historical, and institutional context that affects mental functioning. A critical aspect of the approach he proposes are the cultural tools or "mediational means" that shape both social and individual processes. For parental involvement to happen comfortably and effectively, dialoguing is essential, as parents and teachers

must work together to build common expectations and support student learning. It follows, therefore, that the teacher must establish good relations, open communication, and dialogue with parents (Epstein, 2001).

Building strong, trusting, and mutually respectful relationships between parents and teachers who share similar cultural backgrounds is difficult enough. Doing so between parents and teachers from different backgrounds is even more difficult (Berger, 1996; Epstein, 1990), as teachers need insight into the values, beliefs, and practices of those cultures (Bensman, 2000; Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003; Trumbull et al., 2001). Bensman (2000) argues that cultural interchange, the process by which teachers learn about cultures that their students bring to class and parents learn about the school and the classroom culture, is the way to facilitate dialogue and, consequently, student success. Lee et al. (2003) and Trumbull et al. (2001) argue that this knowledge can then be translated into classroom activities that honor and incorporate culturally based knowledge. Unfortunately, in a school cultural interchange context, teachers and parents carry many preconceived notions about each other that make communication and dialogue even more challenging. Moreover, the dynamics of the parent–teacher relationship create communication problems that, under the best of circumstances, can be problematic (Bensman, 2000; Lee et al., 2003; Trumbull et al., 2001).

To compound this issue, there are a range of factors that inhibit open communication and dialogue between parents and teachers regardless of their cultural backgrounds (Dodd & Konzal, 2001). These include a lack of time for informal opportunities to get to know each other in nonstressful, nonbureaucratic encounters and different understandings of the “proper” roles for teachers and parents (Joshi, 2002). Dialogue is also hampered because of the lack of understanding of the very different beliefs that parents and educators may hold in relation to the purposes, goals, and outcomes of schooling: “it is rare that schools (or those in charge of them) get below the surface to understand how those differences can lead not only to different goals but also completely different views of schooling and, hence, parent involvement” (Trumbull et al., 2001, p. 31). Findings from The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute (2007) suggest that limited communication channels and school-based activities that are impersonal, infrequent, and occur without adequate notice may negate parental involvement. Harris and Goodall (2008) concur with this, suggesting that schools, rather than parents, are often hard to reach. Moles (1999) found that most parents and staff receive little training on how to work with one another and that without proper information and skills, staff and families view each other with suspicion. A difference in the perceived roles and responsibilities of teachers and parents leads to role separation, which is also considered a

constraint limiting parental involvement (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995). When parents in Latino communities were asked to take on responsibilities that they traditionally saw as being the domain of the school, they expressed uncertainty as to what their roles entailed. They felt that their input was encroaching on the school's territory (Sosa, 1997).

Research studies have highlighted other variables contributing to limited parental involvement. For instance, Khan (1996) claims that divorce, growing numbers of single parent families, working parents, and high levels of stress due to the complexity of modern life limit parental involvement. Khan (1996) states that parent perceptions of constraints can be attributed to their feelings of failure and inadequacy which leads to poor self-worth. He adds that parents' inability to help with school work, ingrained apathy of longtime teachers, subsequent lack of responsiveness to parent needs, absence of activities to draw parents into the school, and teacher resentment or suspicion of parents form a potpourri of constraints limiting parental involvement. Moles (1999) concurs that such constraints are equally felt by schools and families in a quest to establish effective partnerships. The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute's (2007) study found that work commitments and inflexible school policies discourage parental participation. From a school perspective, high teacher workloads prevent parents from talking with teachers during the school day. A paucity of innovative parental involvement programs that seek to address such issues also contribute to the growing number of constraints facing parental involvement.

According to Safran (1997), psychological and political factors may make family-school relationships difficult to achieve. Psychological factors refer to emotional issues impacting on communication. Political factors refer to questions of power and authority. Both contribute to the complexity inherent in family-school communications. Although both the family and school place the child's well being at the heart of all communication, different interpretations of "well being" are contentious and cause misconceptions of the roles and responsibilities expected of school community members. Stakeholders may hold divergent views about the purpose of engaging parents, and researchers such as Harris and Goodall (2008) recommend schools examine their practices aligned with purpose.

Family-school partnerships are difficult to nurture without the support of the state, policymakers, community organizations, and employers (Moore, 2011). Moore states that in the absence of clearly defined and articulated policies and a lack of resources to support professional development related to family involvement, constraints surface that detract from parents becoming involved. Administrators may perceive parental involvement as weakening their ability to manage and initiate change. Further, parental interference is said to

reduce the professional autonomy of teachers. A repercussion of this may lead parents to feel unwelcomed at school and to interpret the school culture as being noninclusive (Mitchell, 2008).

Lee and Bowen's study (2006) showed that there was a mismatch of social and cultural capital between schools and families. Mitchell (2008) refers to cultural capital as "predispositions, attitudes, and knowledge gained from experience, particularly education-related experiences" (p. 3) and to social capital as relationships which provide access to information and resources (Mitchell, 2008). Both forms of capital assist parents' entry into schools to support their children's learning. However, as Harris and Goodall (2008) note, parental engagement initiatives presuppose that schools, parents, and pupils are relatively homogeneous and equally willing to develop programs that enhance and sustain parental involvement. A one size fits all approach to parental involvement masks the complexity of needs and roles that parents play and the constraints they face that impede their involvement in schools.

What, then, are the implications of this body of research on parental involvement in the context of Abu Dhabi, UAE? What sociocultural barriers inhibit parental engagement in schools? How can schools construct relationships with parents that build personal efficacy so that productive relationships enhance students' learning?

## Methodology

This is a small scale, exploratory study that follows a case study approach situated within a sociocultural paradigm. It focuses on understanding how people make sense of their experiences within a framework of socially constructed, negotiated, and shared meanings (Merriam, 1998). Merriam says that case study research which focuses on "discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education" (p. 1).

This study took place during the academic year 2010–2011. It was conducted in seven primary PPP schools (4 female schools and 3 male schools) in the city of Abu Dhabi. Six of the selected PPP schools were managed by female staff, and one male school had male staff with a female PPP supervisor. Participants were seven administrators, seven social workers, one teacher per year level from each school (in total, 5 grade levels and 35 teacher participants), and one parent per year level from each school (as per above, a total of 35 parents). Seven focus group interviews were held with parents, and 49 individual interviews were conducted with teachers, administrators, and social workers. The interviews took place at the schools. The semi-structured individual interviews



were 40 minutes in duration, and the semi-structured focus group interviews each lasted one hour.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to enter the inner world of another person to gain understanding from their perspective (Patton, 1990). Interviews afforded depth of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) because participants were encouraged to reflect, discuss, and share their thoughts, beliefs, and experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with administrators, social workers, and teachers. Arabic was the language used with Arabic speaking participants, while English was used to conduct the interviews with native English speakers (licensed teachers or LTs). A combination of Arabic and English was also an option.

Focus groups were considered the most realistic method of data collection for parents given the time constraints and were set up similar to the interviews. Focus groups triggered interaction and dialogue among the participants (Morgan, 1997). They allowed similarities and differences in terms of opinions and experiences to surface, and this gave the data its richness and multidimensional quality. In the findings, excerpts recalling parents' voice are collectively acknowledged as "parents" from the respective schools.

The participants were selected by purposive sampling. As Patton (1990) elaborates, "the logic and power of purposive sampling lies in selecting *information-rich* cases for study" (p. 169, emphasis in the original). Parent participants were selected for their involvement in the school for at least a year and for their involvement in a mothers' council or other school-based activities. Parent participants in one male school were fathers, while in all other PPP primary schools, participants were mothers. Parents were native Arabic speakers, predominantly Emiratis, with a few exceptions from Sudan, Somalia, Tunisia, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine. The criteria for teacher selection were employment in the school for at least a year and a command of English adequate to express their thoughts and perspectives. Emirati, expatriate teachers (Arabs and non-Arabs), licensed teachers (LTs), and Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs) who were involved with parents in a range of school-based activities participated in this study. LTs teaching English, math, and science were expatriate teachers from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, and the United States. Teachers of Arabic, Islamic studies, and social studies were native Arabic speakers: Emiratis, Syrians, Egyptians, Palestinians, and Jordanians. Students have the same contact hours with LTs and Arabic-speaking teachers. Administrators and social workers were Emiratis and were automatically invited to participate in the study.

The criteria for selection of teachers and parents were communicated to the administrators and social workers from the respective schools. Decisions

regarding the selection of teachers and parents were made in consultation with school administrators. Participants were informed of the study via a letter with consent forms attached. These were signed by willing participants and returned to designated school authorities. All communication occurred in both English and Arabic. At the beginning of each interview, researchers reestablished the purpose of the study, outlined the desired research outputs, and highlighted confidentiality measures to safeguard participants and institutions.

In a quest for coverage and uniformity, an interview guide was designed and used to steer the conversation around aspects related to home–school relationships. Interview guidelines were reiterated at the beginning of each interview session in both languages. The guidelines probed perceptions and significance of parental involvement as expressed by various stakeholders. In addition, communication, involvement types, constraints and limitations, and future improvements were also covered. The following examples of questions were used to facilitate dialogue at both semi-structured interviews and focus groups (see Appendix for the full guide):

- Are there any factors that may limit you from being involved at your child's school?
- What areas would you like to be involved in at the school in the future? Please explain some of these opportunities for parental involvement.
- How does the school communicate with you to inform you about opportunities for involvement in school? What are the means of communication that the school uses in order to involve you as a parent? Please explain.
- Do you have any suggestions on how the school can improve parental involvement? Please explain.
- Are there policies that encourage or enhance parents' involvement at the school? What are these guidelines and policies?

Two researchers were present at each interview to ensure accuracy, accountability, and trustworthiness of the data collected. The interviews were recorded manually with meaning clarified during the process. To ensure high quality data collection and authentic voice, present at all interviews was a fluent Arabic speaker, either a member of the research team or a translator. Data was secured in password protected file folders with access available only to the researchers.

The data was coded as part of the iterative process of data collection and interpretation (Creswell, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The emerging themes were analyzed, removed, added, or strengthened as the data analysis process proceeded. During this process of closely analyzing the data, subcodes emerged which substantiated the emergent themes, presenting relationships and/or contradictory evidence (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Intercoder reliability occurred as all three researchers worked simultaneously with the data at all times.

### Limitations of the Study

A limitation of the study was a lack of dedicated time and human resources. This impacted the number and type of schools selected. The Western and Al-Ain regions were excluded from the study, as were kindergartens and secondary schools. While criteria for the selection of participants were clearly communicated to teachers, parents, social workers, and administrators, the final participant selection was authorized by school authorities. This potential for bias was, therefore, unavoidable within the context. Mothers were the majority of parents interviewed as they had (apart from one male school) the greatest presence. Fathers were either underrepresented, did not meet the criteria for selection, or were unavailable. An imbalance in parent voice in relation to gender is, therefore, acknowledged.

### Research Findings

The research findings show that stakeholders hold positive views attesting to the importance of parental involvement. Four themes were identified across stakeholders as constraints to parental involvement: expectations of roles and responsibilities for parental involvement; communication; sociocultural contexts; and provisions. As schools are nested communities, so constraints experienced at one level create a ripple effect across all levels. These ripple effects are conceived, received, and interpreted among stakeholders in different ways. The findings are anecdotal comments which describe the themes and emergent subthemes as voiced by stakeholders.

#### Expectations of Roles and Responsibilities for Parental Involvement

Data indicates that school stakeholders and parents hold positive views attesting to the expectations of parental involvement. A sample of representative views regarding parental involvement follows:

*Administrator 7:* Building a strong bond between the teacher and the student.

*Social Worker 2:* Parental involvement is an inseparable part of the education system. Parents help in education and behavior.

*Social Worker 5:* Parental involvement creates two-channel communication; parents know the gaps at school and the school knows what the gap is at home.

*Teacher 1:* It is very important for us to contact parents to see if there is any problem with the students and propose solutions to check the curriculum, so they can help the students at home. It is also going to model to the

students the importance of homework. It's going to help their skills and reinforce anything that we do in school.

*Parents 3:* Having a clear idea about the curriculum and the teaching methods and having a clear idea about how to support my children at home.

*Parents 2:* Understand the context so we can focus on the child.

Such comments show agreement to engage in parental involvement and in dialogue that benefits all parties in doing what is best for students. The dissonance that arises relates to the way school personnel and parents perceive each others' roles and responsibilities and what equates to expectations set by the "other" in terms of fulfillment of perceived roles and responsibilities. In this section, two subthemes entitled "The Blame Game," and "Deflection to Higher Authorities" capture the constraints felt.

### *The Blame Game*

The failure of one party to meet expectations of the "other" is a source of tension between schools and parents. The situation is aptly described as:

*Administrator 4:* We are living in two separate worlds, the school on one side and the parents on the other side. There is a gap between the school and home.

From this position of "two separate worlds," the dialogue that takes place is one of talking at cross purposes with an inherent tendency to blame the other for failing to act and respond appropriately. The following comments are illustrative of the school blaming parents for failure to get involved and to support their children's academic and behavioral needs:

*Administrator 4:* The student is living in two contradictory worlds of discipline...this leads to more problems at school...we want parents to follow up at home academically and behaviorally.

*Social Worker 4:* I wish they would monitor the disciplinary problems. Parents need to follow up.

*Social Worker 1:* They [parents] should contact the school and know about the daily things all the time. The parents should have a connection. Like a close relation, they should know everything.

*Teacher 2:* They think it is the school's job, and the school has to do everything for their students. About 30% think like this. They think it is unimportant to talk to the teacher.

*Teacher 4:* Parents misunderstand parental involvement, and they start criticizing, especially when it comes to grading and assessment.

From the parents' perspective there is an acknowledgement that:

*Parent 2:* Some parents are helpful and like to share. Others do nothing. They think it is the school that has to do everything.

Having said this, parents blame schools for not being able to communicate meaningfully on matters related to curriculum reforms and student academic and behavioral issues. The onus to begin and sustain communication with parents is seen as the school's role and responsibility. This blame game has caused confusion and frustration among parents:

*Parent 4:* The school can't tell us what is going on. They send us the school policies, but we are not informed about the bad behavior. We want to be informed regularly.

*Parent 7:* We don't know what is happening in the class. The process of learning is becoming secretive.

### *Deflection to Higher Authorities*

Both schools and parents draw attention to higher educational authorities. Support is needed to minimize tensions by providing clearer delineation of roles and responsibilities allocated to schools and parents:

*Administrator 3:* We need a policy that dictates his involvement as a parent, and this policy should be empowered by ADEC and issued by ADEC.

*Social Worker 3:* ADEC needs to make an awareness campaign [project] about parental involvement; they can look at the culture of the Emirati society—their customs and their traditions—and send more messages about how parents can become involved.

*Teacher 5:* We hope ADEC can have a website for parents so parents can be updated.

*Parent 2:* The email has not been functional yet. We would like them (ADEC) to functionalize the email communications especially for progress reports... and follow up on the academic achievement and the curriculum.

### **Communication**

Stakeholders note that while home-school communication channels exist and some are effective—namely phone calls, transmission of SMS (text) messages, and written letters—these and other modes of communication are hindered by broader constraints. For example, ADEC has introduced electronic communication and expects schools to use it. Our data revealed that this was not necessarily successful, since parents who are nonversant with electronic modes of communication were unable to use the system. Constraints noted in this section include: language barrier; lack of knowledge to receive, process, and transmit information; and modes of communication which were either absent, nonfunctional, *ad hoc*, or ineffective.

*Language Barrier*

With regard to informing parents about the reforms, stakeholders concurred that the medium of transmission—English—served as a barrier to communication on all matters related to and stemming from the reform. The challenge that emerged most strongly was an inability to receive information on changes in curriculum and pedagogy:

*Administrator 5:* Mums don't know English, so they can't communicate with the LTs. Especially, they can't communicate with English, math, and science teachers.

*Social Worker 1:* ADEC has changed everything and made everything in English. Math is in English. Science is in English. Before it used to be in Arabic. Now, in English, it is very difficult. Especially now [that] we have foreign teachers...parents need to start working with the child in English. Now we have a translator for this.

*Social Worker 2:* Some Arab mothers are illiterate in English.

*Teacher 1:* The problem is with English, and we have communication difficulties.

*Teacher 2:* Sometimes when mothers are approached, they say, "We don't speak English, so how do you expect us to teach our children at home?"

*Parent 2:* The language barrier sometimes creates a problem in communication and understanding the curriculum and pedagogy. [We] can't communicate because the teachers don't speak Arabic, and the parents don't speak English. Sometimes we can't follow up at home because the worksheets are in English. It is too rapid [a] change.

*Lack of Knowledge to Receive, Process, and Transmit Information*

Stakeholders were compromised in their ability to receive, process, and transmit information owing to a lack of background knowledge to comprehend it. For some parents, this meant not having the educational background and level of literacy required to communicate on parental involvement:

*Administrator 3:* Sometimes uneducated parents with low levels of education can't help their kids, especially with the introduction of the new curriculum and English being the medium of instruction.

*Administrator 4:* Sometimes we have illiterate parents, so the mum can't help him at home. She can't read our communication letters.

*Social Worker 1:* There are a percentage of mothers who have not been schooled.

*Teacher 3:* In a remote area, parents are not educated, and they are older, and they can't realize the importance of sharing in the school activities, so they leave this to the teachers.

*Parent 2:* Some mums are illiterate, so they can't take part, or they come from lower education standards.

For parents, the lack of transparency related to communication is also concerned with the giving and sharing of student academic and behavioral records and observations by the school:

*Parent 4:* We would like to attend science and English classes...but we were never invited.

*Parent 4:* We aren't informed about behavioral problems. All the problems that happen to our kids, like bullying, we know about it through our kids.

*Parent 3:* We would like to get a weekly report on the child's performance, not only grades [academic] but also psychological—how is their relationship with the teacher?

### *Communication About Curriculum and Pedagogy*

Numerous issues were raised by parents regarding their lack of knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy as hindering their involvement in schools. These related to communication about curricular changes and assessments, lack of resources, instructional material provided to parents in English, and English as a medium of instruction. Parents voiced their interest in being informed about the curriculum and pedagogy to support their children's learning at home.

*Parent 4:* I want to help but am afraid to help, because I do not want to confuse him. Here they teach phonics differently from what they were taught at school in our time. We are not aware how we teach the science experiments...We need workshops on the new curriculum.

*Parent 7:* We need to be informed more about the curriculum. The new curriculum restricts us. The new curriculum is hard and also the English as a medium of instruction, where science is difficult because of the English... There are no books to help us, and it's a problem to follow up, and we want teachers to explain in class. We need more details on what is taught in class.

Views expressed by parents and reiterated by teachers include:

*Teacher 2:* Parents are shocked at the different learning techniques, not using text books, they feel they have to have a source [book] not worksheets. It is important to improve parents' skills...we don't know how to teach them at home...The modern curriculum is in English, and it is not enough for just the teacher to help. We need the parents' support...we try to involve the parents to come in the class and work with us.

*Teacher 6:* Because they [parents] don't know how to help their children, they do not want to come to school and be involved.

In relation to bringing parents on board through shared knowledge of the reforms, teachers and parents confirmed that there is a lack of reporting from the school on changes in curriculum and pedagogy:

*Teacher 1:* Limited communication channels failed to adequately facilitate pedagogical and curricular transference of information to parents; we are lost in translation...they (parents) don't understand English very well; therefore, it is difficult to communicate.

*Parent 4:* We want to discuss problems such as students' achievement, misbehavior, bullying, and curriculum involvement. We want to attend classes... we need the handouts, syllabus, and weekly plan on the internet so we can follow up with our kids and help them.

Administrators and social workers commented that ADEC is not transparent in its communication to parents regarding curricular changes.

*Administrator 4:* There are new trends in education going on in the school, and the parents at home are unaware of these changes.

*Social Worker 5:* No parent representatives are at ADEC, especially when it comes to the new curriculum [and] English being the medium of instruction. Parents need to voice their opinion about the curriculum to ADEC.

#### *Modes of Communication: Problems with Transmittal and Reception*

To add to the communication barrier, transmittal of electronic communication was disrupted during the reforms. This involved the transfer of authority from the Abu Dhabi Education Zone (ADEZ) to the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC). Stakeholders perceived this mode as an ineffective method of communication for the following reasons:

*Administrator 3:* We used to communicate with parents through the "future electronic," a means organized by ADEZ. It is closed now because of the integration between ADEC and ADEZ. We don't use emails because parents can't use it or access it.

*Administrator 6:* We have put up a school website, and we sent a letter informing the parents about this service, but the response was very limited. We don't know whether they didn't respond because they don't know how to use the internet or because they don't care.

*Administrator 6:* Parents are ignorant of electronic communication...Fathers give us their emails so we can communicate with them, but electronic communication is a novelty among mothers, and this needs addressing.

*Social Worker 6:* The electronic system hasn't been functionalized yet due to the takeover of ADEZ by ADEC, but we were told that emails/electronic communications would be functional soon; however, they weren't.



*Social Worker 5:* Email is not very popular. It is not functional. That's why we give the information to the girls to give to the parents.

*Teacher 3:* The quality of the translation happens to be left to whom is close by. With miscommunication there is more tension. There is only one official classroom interpreter; parents say, "we don't know English," what can we do?

*Parent 4:* We need to receive SMS to inform us about exams, schedules, and progress reports.

Another source of concern was a lack of expenditure to invest in developing communication systems and channels for parental involvement. Budget limitation is said to lead to understaffing, which negates the promotion of effective communication either through hiring someone to be responsible for parent communication or hiring more translators:

*Administrator 4:* We are understaffed, so we need to allocate a person who is in charge of the parents' communication channel. We need a special budget to spend on encouraging parents to take part and to organize more activities, paying for specialized people to conduct workshops on issues needed, such as communication and management. We need money to open continuing education classes for illiterate mums.

*Administrator 6:* We don't have translators at school.

*Social Worker 6:* Mothers who don't speak English find it hard to deal and communicate with LTs, since we don't have translators at the school.

*Social Worker 1:* The school needs to communicate to parents, however, the school doesn't have a communication mechanism.

*Parent 2:* Sometimes we can't follow at home because the worksheets are in English. It is too rapid [a] change. Some say that we can use translators, but, in fact, we have to call friends to know what is going on. Moreover, workshops are conducted and delivered in English...parents are unable to understand what is going on.

### *Content, Tone, and Style of Communication*

Administrators recognized the need for training teachers on how to communicate face-to-face with parents.

*Administrator 4:* We need some training for teachers to train them how to communicate with parents. Some teachers are negative and lack interpersonal communications with parents. Teachers and administrative staff need to be trained in how to communicate with parents.

Parents raised the issue of trust in communicating with the school personnel, especially with teachers. They commented that negative attitudes and remarks of teachers marred relationships and acted as a deterrent to starting

and continuing communication. Parents were concerned about the lack of updates received from the school.

*Parent 4:* The problem is that we are not welcomed, and the administration doesn't want to involve us.

*Parent 6:* Teachers give us negative feedback about our girls, so we stop coming to see the teachers.

### **Sociocultural Context**

In the sociocultural context of Abu Dhabi, there are constraints that act on the school. Some arise from the sociocultural norms and mores, others pertain to limited yet significant cross-cultural marriages and to changes in some of the society's practices. These need acknowledgement and appropriate mediation to allow for comfortable and effective access to parental involvement. Four broad themes emerged from the findings: male and female segregation in schools; social inhibitions concerning the roles of mothers and fathers; cross-cultural marriages, and divorce and separation.

#### *Male and Female Segregation in Schools*

Segregation of women and men and subsequent role delineation still prevails in the public schools in Abu Dhabi. In male schools, the opinion expressed was that mothers were uncomfortable to meet with male teachers and avoided the schools if these schools were administered by males. By the same token, fathers shied away from visiting the female schools administered by females and were in deference of female teachers who were covered.

Teachers, parents, and administrators expressed the reality of the social constraints related to male–female segregation in schools:

*Administrator 2:* Fathers are shy to come, because it is a female community.

*Teacher 1:* Dads are not allowed, because it's a girls' school. It is difficult socially and religiously speaking to meet with the fathers. I cover my face; it is hard to allow fathers to attend my class, because I have to cover my face in his presence.

*Teacher 3:* Mothers sometimes come to the school [boys' school run by males], but not always. We have to underline the point that tradition may not allow the mother to come. They may not like to communicate with male teachers.

*Teacher 5:* It is more comfortable to talk to mothers. I met the father; I was shy, and he was, too, and not at ease. The meeting lasted for five minutes. With the mother, our meeting would have lasted 50 minutes.

*Parent 3:* Parents coming to school to check on their children is not available for [just] anyone...to enter the girls' school—the administration does not allow fathers to enter the school. More flexible regulations are required. The

school gate should be open—why do they close the doors? Over the past 20 years there is change. Now, we can talk together....Being in a boys' school will restrict mothers from coming, and they cannot come.

A few mothers and social workers expressed a change in attitudes in the following of traditions.

*Parent 3:* I [female parent in a male school] have no problems with traditions.

I go to the boys' school...not many mothers would think the way I do, because of the customs and traditions. It is not acceptable for wives to come to boys' schools to talk with male teachers. Their husbands will prevent them from doing that...this will make a great gap between home and school. It is a big problem for mothers, and there is more involvement in girls' schools because of traditions.

*Social Worker 3:* The custom here [Abu Dhabi] makes it hard for mothers to communicate with male teachers; now society is changing...this year we started a mothers' council in a school run by males.

#### *Social Inhibitions Relating to the Roles of Mothers and Fathers*

The cultural expectations of male and female roles determine the extent to which fathers are involved in their children's schooling. As mothers are expected to take charge of their children's schooling, mothers are held accountable for parental involvement, and fathers have less involvement. While parental involvement is considered a female responsibility, at the same time, some mothers face social inhibitions that create barriers preventing them from being involved. For instance, some husbands or male guardians limit their wives' involvement in male schools and, in the same way, they limit the women's use of taxi transportation.

*Social Worker 4:* Some mothers can't communicate with us because she doesn't have transportation. Her husband doesn't allow her to catch a taxi.

*Teacher 2:* If a mother doesn't have a car or she doesn't drive, it is hard for her to come to school....There is no one to drop her off.

#### *Cross-Cultural Marriages*

Abu Dhabi is a monoethnic society, so cross-cultural marriages are not common practice. Yet, administrators and teachers drew attention to this phenomenon as being a constraint to parental involvement because of the cultural or ethnic identity of the mother:

*Administrator 1:* Some mothers are non-Arabs...so the student is embarrassed to allow mother's involvement at the school, because students don't want the school to meet with their mums because the mum is a foreigner and doesn't speak Arabic; this is only 10% who are Indians or Filipinos.

*Teacher 5:* Sometimes if the mother is non-Emirati, she is shy to come to school.

### *Divorce and Separation*

Another social issue voiced by administrators, social workers, and parents alike referred to the high percentage of divorce and marital separation (especially as compared to other Arab countries, see ECSSR, 2007) hindering parental involvement.

*Administrator 1:* Some mothers refuse to come to school to meet the teachers, administrators, or social worker because she is separated or divorced, and she wants to detach herself from her kids to annoy the husband.

*Social Worker 4:* Thirty percent of our student population suffers from divorce and separation. It makes parental involvement less, and also parents become detached from their children, because each parent blames it on the other, and they punish each other by neglecting the boys.

*Parent 5:* If I am divorced and my husband has gone away, how can I support my kids? We need one team for support. Team teachers, counselors, specialists—to help the family.

### **Provisions**

Stakeholders recognized the knowledge gap created by the reform process, in terms of parents lack of understanding of the new curriculum and pedagogy. Stakeholders acknowledged the limited nature of current provisions to mediate this gap. These provisions were limited by structures, methods, and processes which were either absent or unworkable and, hence, hindered effective communication. The following themes emerged from the findings: lack of organization and support system; continuing parent education and workshops; and decision making and policies.

#### *Lack of Organization and Support System*

The lack of organization and support system for parental involvement was considered a constraint by administrators, social workers, and parents. Parents concurred with administrators on the issue of budget and staffing as a factor hindering parental involvement:

*Administrator 4:* These logistics are beyond our control as administrators. We need more administrative staff. We communicate through our secretaries. We need to allocate a person in charge of the parents' communication channel. We need some training for teachers on how to communicate with parents. We need to be allocated a budget to organize more activities on communication, management, and continuing education for parents.

*Administrator 1:* We need ADEC's decision and approval for early dismissal so teachers can plan for these conferences.

*Social Worker 2:* There are seven periods in a day, and because the teachers are busy in their classroom during all those periods, maybe they are only free during the break time...parents need to have an appointment with that particular teacher.

*Parents 3:* The school needs to develop a reception area and allocate a receptionist so we can talk to her.

Inadequate organization and support systems to accommodate the needs of working mothers was expressed by stakeholders. For example, working mothers stated the need to have appointments scheduled in advance to request release from work to meet with teachers.

*Parent 2:* Because I am a working mum, it hinders me, and teachers don't give their numbers to anyone, so working mothers can't communicate.

School personnel also recognized this need and made suggestions in response:

*Social Worker 2:* The school needs to give working mothers three days' notice [allocate time] before the meeting so they can get permission from work.

*Social Worker 5:* Working mothers face a restriction. I suggest organizing the function in the afternoons to involve more working mothers.

*Teacher 7:* Working mothers can't leave work to take part in school meetings or school celebrations, and sometimes fathers are outside the country, so they can't come to school.

Most schools allocated a specific day or time for parents to visit the school to follow up on their children's work. However, a lack of support systems have failed to effectively develop an organizational process. These limitations arise from the schools' structural organization characterized by heavy teacher workloads and overburdened administrative staff hindering the facilitation of effective parent-teacher communication and advance scheduling of parent-teacher meetings. The following constraints were expressed by social workers and teachers:

*Social Worker 7:* We need to allocate two hours after school or during the weekend where the parents can come and check on kids, because working mums usually can't come, and sometimes parents come when teachers are teaching so teachers can't leave their class to meet the parents.

*Teacher 1:* Parents can come anytime to meet the social worker. They don't take an appointment. We wait for them upstairs in the meeting room. This year I don't have enough time. I teach five lessons every day, and I need to correct students' work on break time. I don't have enough time, so I call them at the end of the day.... We finish at 2 o'clock. I leave the school at 2:40 every day. I am doing my work day by day; some of them [parents] come in during my lunch.

*Teacher 3:* The school allows the knocking at the door. There is no assigned allocation for parents to come. I am not sure if parents even know if they should check into an office to book an appointment with the teacher. I teach 30 sessions a week, and it leaves me with five free periods. I cannot provide them with five or ten minutes when the students are running wild.

In addition, parents stated that time allocated for parent–teacher meetings did not meet their personal schedule or needs in terms of length and allocation:

*Parent 2:* There is no policy for appointments; it is left to the teacher’s initiative to do this.

*Parent 6:* The time is usually not suitable for us [mothers]. We need more frequent parent–teacher meetings.

*Parent 6:* We need the administration to schedule parent–teacher meetings. The time allocated—one hour a day for the whole school—is not enough. They need to send us reminders about the dates for parent–teacher meetings for each subject.

From the teachers’ perspective, an advisory system as part of a new school structural organization to meet the needs of parents is required:

*Teacher 7:* [The] advisory program needs improvement and to be developed. The project of advisory [with reference to] teacher–parent–student meetings—we started now for one and a half months; individual interviews—this is a very good idea. We get to know the [student’s] weaknesses and strengths. Sharing this information with teachers is good.

#### *Continuing Education and Workshops*

Continuing education and workshops for parents were in evidence in some schools, but they were inadequately funded and delivered in English. Furthermore, they did not adequately address aspects of curriculum and pedagogy to assist parents in understanding the reform:

*Administrator 4:* We need a special budget to allocate for continuing education.

*Teacher 1:* Most of the workshops for math and science are delivered in English. This is a problem for parents who speak little or no English.

*Teacher 4:* Parents need to be involved in curriculum workshops so they know what is going on in the classroom.

*Teacher 5:* One of the most important workshops for parents is about educating the parents on the curriculum—what are the teaching approaches adopted by the teachers in the school. Walk them through the teaching philosophy. Parents are very angry about their child’s marks when I explain the breakdown and how are they assessing.

*Parent 4:* We need workshops on the new curriculum.

### *Decision Making and Policies*

Clear policies to support decision making within the school on parental involvement were absent despite recognition by stakeholders of this need. Administrators and teachers stated that there were no official policies to support parents and the school in enlisting and sustaining parental involvement.

*Administrator 3:* We [school administrators] need to be in an agreement with the parents at the beginning of the year that dictates that the parent needs to come to school whenever he is needed as an obligatory agreement and part of the policy... We need a policy that dictates his involvement as a parent, and this should be empowered by ADEC.

*Teacher 4:* The school doesn't have a policy to encourage or motivate parent involvement.

School personnel recognized the need for a policy to support joint decision making with parents in partnering on academic and disciplinary matters:

*Social Worker 3:* It is important to take their ideas and their opinions about the learning process in general. We have to focus on activities that may give an opportunity for the parents to take part in the education.

*Teacher 3:* No real policies and procedures surrounding the communication... in light of the reforms, we have to give parents an opportunity to come to the classroom to have an overview about ways of teaching and to express their opinions/ideas about these approaches, so they can share their ideas with the teacher; this should happen once a month.

Equally, parents recognized the need to be involved in decision making concerning curriculum, assessment, and discipline.

*Parent 4:* We want to take a role in enhancing changes on the discipline and order at the school.

*Parent 6:* We need to be encouraged to solve some of the problems at the school such as bullying.

## **Discussion**

The following discussion captures the constraints and subsequent limitations to parental involvement that are present in the sociocultural context of Abu Dhabi as identified by the stakeholders through a series of interviews and focus groups. Stakeholders recognized the benefits of school-based and home-based parental involvement, yet, within the sociocultural context and context of rapid educational change, challenges are posed for parental involvement to sit comfortably and occur effectively. Parents and school personnel are currently recipients of change with few realistic opportunities for parents to play an

active role and few effective means in place to mitigate the constraints that exist. These constraints are either inherent within the sociocultural context itself or have been created in the reform process and are shared among stakeholders, namely, expectations of roles and responsibilities for parental involvement, communication, sociocultural contexts, and provisions. As the constraints have often become attributable to failing to fulfill roles and responsibilities, a blame game has ensued between school and home. This blame game, which centers on who is accountable for making parental involvement work, involves ADEC, schools, and parents.

For parental involvement to sit comfortably, stakeholders need reassurance from ADEC that through collaboration, there will be a shared vision and understanding of parental involvement as a living, enduring entity. As this entity emerges through mutual understanding, constraints and limitations in its implementation should be resolved and so make the rhetoric of parental involvement a reality. For this to happen, Scribner, Young, and Pedroza (1999) point out that a uniform, harmonized perception of parental involvement must prevail for better implementation. To achieve this, there needs to be open communication among the stakeholders and with ADEC through a consistent, multichanneled, and dual language approach. In turn, open and effective dialoguing should inform planning that respects and incorporates all perspectives. As Lee et al. (2003) emphasize, planning and practice involve shared meaning making. This necessitates a structured mechanism, reorganization of communication channels, and the introduction of a support system for parental involvement (Trumbull et al., 2001). This study shows that an effective support system should be a priority within Abu Dhabi as the constraints tend to separate school and home.

Within the sociocultural context itself, there are constraints which arise from the cultural norms and mores of Emirati society. As Bensman (2000) and Trumbull et al. (2001) point out, it is important that parents are consulted on how to minimize sociocultural constraints that impact parental involvement. For example, as the norms of this society can restrict the movement of women, there should be consideration by schools as to how efforts should be channeled for a more comfortable fit. The changing social realities that surround children, such as divorce and an increase in the number of working mothers, should also affect culturally sensitive policies and provisions. Parental involvement should accommodate for the needs of a range of home circumstances by adjusting provisions and processes in order to facilitate parental involvement rather than limit it from happening.

There has been a fundamental shift in paradigm from a traditional approach to a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. This, combined with



parent knowledge, experience, and background to understand and adopt new initiatives, should be given due consideration as parents may be illiterate, have limited knowledge of English, and have experience of schooling in a traditional model. These western-based epistemologies and pedagogies have resulted in a fundamental knowledge and language gap which does not sit comfortably with stakeholders and necessitates a sociocultural approach to mediation (Wertsch, 1991). Stakeholders have acknowledged this gap and concur that parents should question and provide input into the new curriculum and pedagogy. Similarly, gaps have occurred on all dimensions of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995). As a result, parents have been compromised, whether through knowledge and language, or through a lack of transparency, provisions, and communication. Further, there have been few effective efforts or positive results of mediation.

A few innovative attempts have been made by school administrators to bridge the gaps identified for parents. An example is schools which are offering workshops to parents on information technology and English language. Such innovations, though reportedly having had some positive effects, do not directly tackle the immediate needs identified by parents. In reality, education, training, and support to build collaborative capacities both in the short and long term should be provided for stakeholders, including networking with others and seeking professional assistance at all levels.

## **Recommendations**

Drawing from the perspectives of the stakeholder groups as to the constraints and subsequent limitations of parental involvement, recommendations can be made that should work well within the sociocultural context of Abu Dhabi. Many concerns can be alleviated by involving stakeholders in the education reform process. Stakeholder voices on the dimension of parental involvement should be noted through meaningful and constructive dialogues conducted bilingually and with respect for the first language. Processes and provisions which have been identified as limitations should be modified. Stakeholders, inclusive of parents, need to be empowered to be important constructive change agents. This cannot be achieved without adequate budgeting, staffing, provisions, support structures, and accessible and effective communication channels. Clear roles and responsibilities need to be worked through with the stakeholders, and continuing education for both parents and school staff should support both short and long term goals.

Greater transparency is needed during this continuing paradigm shift as change is inevitable. School administrators need to be informed in advance

about school reforms, plans, and changes to be proactive and actively engaged in decision making. Parental involvement efforts should be evaluated and ongoing modifications made as stakeholders become constructive agents of change participating in meaningful dialogue during the change process.

Findings from our study suggest that schools, with ADEC's support and guidance, need to become active decision-making entities by being ready and prepared to accommodate such rapid and fundamentally disorienting transitions through organizational structures and policies (at both the macro and micro level), implemented through appropriate and functioning communication systems, and providing support structures to facilitate parents' involvement in their children's education. These schools currently tend to offer limited support as challenges presented are handled reactively and/or in an *ad hoc* manner. Budgeting, restructuring, and staffing are needed to strengthen and expand on existing systems designed to support parental involvement. Systematic improvement (and, in some cases, restructuring) is needed to strengthen and expand existing systems of communication. This should happen with increased involvement of professional Arabic-speaking translators to work as effective sociocultural and language mediators, because language is the most critical tool for cultural transmission (Vygotsky, 1986).

## Conclusion

This study has explored the issues and portrayed a picture of the status quo of parental involvement in the context of Abu Dhabi. It has provided some in-depth understanding of the current state of the situation, identifying constraints and subsequent limitations in the sociocultural context and context of rapid change. The findings are valuable to inform the process of parental involvement in this milieu, and may be helpful to others in the process of educational reforms and rapid change, as well. As this is a small scale study, the researchers recommend that further research be carried out on all aspects of parental involvement in Abu Dhabi.

In summary, the researchers conclude that a gap has been created between the rhetoric of ADEC's need for parental involvement (NSM Policy Manual, 2010, p. 35) and the reality of its implementation. Overall, the findings call for reciprocation between home and school through effective dialoguing to develop a framework which accommodates stakeholders comfortably and occurs effectively in context. It is envisaged that a homegrown model of parental involvement will evolve with careful monitoring and evaluative processes occurring at all levels and on all dimensions through ongoing stakeholder participation. The gap will close between the school and home in ways that empower stakeholders in the process and support children's school success.

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## Appendix: Interview Guidelines

### Interview Guidelines for Parents:

1. What does parental involvement mean to you? Please explain.
2. In what ways do you consider parental involvement significant? Please explain.
3. How does the school communicate with you to inform you about opportunities for involvement in school? What are the ways of communicating that the school follows in order to involve you as a parent? Please explain.
4. Do you have any suggestions on how the school can improve parental involvement? Please explain.
5. In what aspects or ways does the school involve parents?
6. Are there any factors that may limit parents' involvement at your school? If so, what are these limitations?
7. What do you think are the effects (for parents and for children) of limited or no parental involvement in school/at home?
8. What areas would you like to be involved in at the school in the future? Please explain some of these opportunities for parental involvement.
9. Are there any factors that may limit you from being involved at your child's school?
10. As a parent, have you personally been involved at your child's school? How? In what ways?
11. Are there policies that encourage or enhance parents' involvement at the school? What are these guidelines and policies?

### Interview Guidelines for Teachers, Social Workers, and Administrators:

1. What does parental involvement mean to you? Please explain.
2. In what ways do you consider parental involvement significant? Please explain.
3. How does the school communicate with parents to inform them about opportunities for involvement in school? What are the ways of communicating that the school uses in order to involve parents? Please explain.
4. Do you have any suggestions on how the school can improve parental involvement in the school? Please explain.
5. In what aspects or ways does the school involve parents?
6. Are there any factors that may limit parents' involvement at your school? If so, what are these limitations?
7. What do you think are the effects (for parents and for children) of limited or no parental involvement in school/at home?
8. What areas would you like parents to be involved at the school in the future? What are the opportunities of involvement for parents? Please explain.
9. Are there any factors that may limit parents from being involved at your school?
10. Does the school have any policies that encourage or enhance parental involvement? What are these guidelines and policies?